

## The Clipper Visits Local Jazz Singer Rebecca Parris

BY DONNA AUSTIN

Renowned jazz singer and recipient of nine Boston Music Awards, Rebecca Parris routinely dazzles her audiences as she performs songs by legendary artists including, George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, Carroll Coates, Carmen McRae and Sarah Vaughan.

This spring, Parris performed at an AIDS benefit concert at Plymouth Plantation. "I do AIDS benefits whenever I get the chance. I have lost so many friends," said Parris. With her was Paul McWilliams on piano and Mark Bellwood on sound and vocals. McWilliams and Bellwood perform regularly at the Sun Tavern on Friday nights.

Her current projects include a release of her LP, *Double Rainbow*, to CD format next month. This is the third of her seven LP's that have been released to CD format. She is also working on a new CD including many of her personal favorites and often requested ballads. Accompanying her on piano is George Mesterhazy. A release date has not yet been scheduled as she is currently in search of a new record label.

Parris also offers private voice coaching to aspiring soloists and lectures throughout the country to students, teachers and public officials about



Rebecca Parris

the music business and the importance of keeping music programs in the schools.

Parris grew up in Newton, and spent her summers at the family cottage in Kingston. She began singing in shows with her father (an accomplished musician and college professor) at age six. "Plus he was an actor at Summer Stock and that's where I got my start," she said. Parris and her Dad performed Broadway musicals up and down the East Coast with Summer Stock. Her uncle (voice coach for JFK) was her first voice instructor.

Her parents moved to Duxbury in 1971 where "they both served at the Christian Science Church here in Duxbury," said Parris. Both of her parents were talented pia-

nists and church organists. Her mother was the church organist for the Newton Christian Science Church for 35 years. Her father, in addition to acting and playing piano, was a professor of English, French and Spanish and taught at Northeastern University, Boston University and several prestigious undergraduate schools. He was also the choir director and church organist for the Belmont Methodist Church for many years. Rebecca has 2 sisters, Robin, also a Duxbury resident and Susan who lives in Dorchester.

At ten years old, Parris was singing solos and at 18 she took off for the big apple to make her fame and fortune. She quickly became disillusioned with the "nastiness" of New York and returned to Boston where she began working six nights a week as the lead singer in a rock band. For the next 10 years she performed all over New England with various rock bands, but her true love was always jazz. She found jazz clubs in the Boston area and was occasionally asked to sit in. When it became obvious to Parris that she truly missed the joy and challenge of jazz she found a vocal group that performed jazz standards and sang with them for a year. Since then she has continued on her own and has performed

on stage with such greats as Dizzy Gillespie, The Count Basie, Woody Herman, Gunther Shculler Orchestras, Buddy Rich, Joe Williams, Shirley Horn and many others.

Throughout her career Parris has performed all over the United States, Europe and the Far East. In 1980 she moved to Duxbury and has lived here ever since.

When asked, of all places you have been, why settle in

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Duxbury? She replied with a broad smile, "It's the best place to live, it's beautiful, it's near the water and I'll always live here."

Recently under new management with Rogers-Barry Artist Management, Parris will be performing in the New England area for most of the summer.

You do not need to be a jazz fan to enjoy a performance by Rebecca Parris. She is tall, blond, curvaceous and favors sequence tops that tend to slide off her shoulder. She is well liked and respected by her peers in the music industry for

her passion for jazz, her skillful and insightful delivery and her saucy wit on stage. Steve Marvin, who has done several shows with Parris in addition to the upcoming *Salute to Sinatra* said, "When I'm singing with Rebecca it's like working with a soul-mate. She has the same emotions about the songs that I do. It doesn't get any better than Rebecca. She's the best." Kenny Hadley, leader of the 16 piece Kenny Hadley Big Band has performed extensively with Parris over the past 20 years and recorded a CD with her entitled, *Beautiful Friendship* in 1995. Said Hadley, "I really enjoy working with Rebecca. She's a blast. She can stand in front of that band and she doesn't get blown away. She's such a powerful singer; and so energetic."

Some of Parris' performances this summer include the Marblehead Jazz Festival on July 10<sup>th</sup>, a sunset cruise around Boston Harbor on the 16<sup>th</sup>, teaching at the Interplay Jazz Camp in Wilton, New Hampshire August 1<sup>st</sup> through the 8<sup>th</sup> and a show at the Maudslay Arts Center in Newburyport, on the 21<sup>st</sup>. For more information about Rebecca Parris visit her web site at [www.rebeccaparris.com](http://www.rebeccaparris.com).